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ABSTRACT

The student teacher, practicum, or field experience student can fit readily into a whole language classroom even if he or she has not been trained to use the process. The teacher needs to take time to discover the student associate's strengths and abilities; time taken to examine these abilities and to consider how they might be mutually complementary with the teacher's interests is quite worthwhile. Student teachers should be involved in planning lessons from the very beginning, as are the students in a whole language classroom. The continuance of a literate environment in the classroom can be ensured by using the skills of the student teacher to enhance and expand the community of learners in the classroom. (RS)

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THE READING/WRITING CONNECTION:

USING STUDENT TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Student teachers in elementary classrooms face a tremendous variety of academic situations. Some teachers are using only basal readers, others the whole language approach, still others are journal-writing, or using other techniques. Student teachers are expected to adapt to the classroom environment of the classroom teacher. Methodology and presentation of material need to complement those in use.

This paper, a written version of a presentation made at the annual meetings of the Iowa Reading Association, April 6-9, 1989, stresses the importance of the reading-writing connection and ways the student teacher can implement reading/writing techniques within this framework. Material was presented in a lecture format with discussion following. The intended audience was college instructors of elementary education students and classroom teachers who work with student teachers.

THE READING/WRITING CONNECTION:

USING STUDENT TEACHERS

A substantial amount of material has appeared in professional literature in the past few years on the reading/writing connection, also referred to as the whole language approach. Authors stress the importance of integrating writing and reading throughout the school curriculum (Atwell, 1987; Butler and Trubill, 1987; Durkin, 1989; and Hansen, 1987). Although more research is needed, learning to read and write involve many of the same steps and teachers need to understand the process involved in both.

In describing the reading/writing connection, Butler and Turbill (1987) discuss some of the major components involved. Essential elements include: reading to children, time for individualized reading, guided reading, modeled writing, opportunities for children to write, and time to share responses to reading and writing. All of these activities are integrated throughout the day and the teacher is available to model and support students in this process.

Marie Clay (1975) believes that creative writing complements a reading program. It allows the child to gain awareness of print and to understand that print has meaning. Letters and words become part of the child's writing and reading vocabulary.

The student teacher, practicum or field experience student can fit readily into this framework even if he/she has not been trained to use this process. Just as the children in the classroom are treated as individuals and the teacher begins with what the child knows, the student teacher is involved at his/her own level. The classroom is a supportive community where learners respond. The teacher models appropriate responses to reading and writing and allows time for others in the classroom to respond to each other.

If the process of placement of a student teacher, practicum or field experience person hasn't included a fairly detailed interview, the teacher needs to take the time to discover the student associate's strengths and abilities. Time taken to examine these abilities and how they might be mutually complementary are quite worthwhile. These interests can be utilized to reach students one might otherwise not be able to involve.

In a reading/writing classroom ample time is given to students to talk about their reading and writing. This is done through individual and small group conferences and with the entire class when appropriate. During conference time, the teacher spends most of the time listening to students and demonstrates active listening both verbally and nonverbally. The teacher offers suggestions and may expand upon ideas, but the pupil decides whether to accept these suggestions. Students can also learn to do this with each other. The student teacher provides another sounding board. Children enjoy having another adult with whom they can share their reading and writing. If the pupils keep journals or write letters, they can share these with the student teacher. The student teacher is made aware that responses should be to the content rather than to the mechanics in journals.

Teaching writing and reading is viewed as a process. As part of this process, the student teacher will be encouraged to share some of his/her favorite books. This can be done verbally during shared reading or through written responses in journals. The cooperating teacher and student teacher may discuss a book that they have both read. Differing views about what the author is saying may be expressed. Students in the class can learn thereby, that we don't all interpret things in the same way; we may disagree on how we feel

about a book and this is all right.

Rather than just observing for the first few weeks, the student teacher needs to quickly become a part of the classroom community. In an integrated whole language classroom, the students and teacher cooperatively plan learning experiences based on individual needs and interests. The student teacher should also be involved from the very beginning. It can be very beneficial to have another adult who teaches mini lessons, holds conferences, and responds to individual needs.

Because teachers have different strengths and interests, a student teacher can be a real asset. Teachers share books that they enjoy and are more enthusiastic about literature that they love. A student teacher can bring another dimension to the classroom. If one of the goals of a whole language classroom is to immerse children in literature (Atwell, 1987; Butler and Turbill, 1987), then the student teacher should be looked at as another valuable resource. Does the student teacher enjoy dramatics, choral speaking, singing, story telling and/or role playing? Children enjoy being able to work in small groups to dramatize or role play a favorite story. The student teacher can be both a resource and facilitator as children prepare a presentation.

In classrooms where there are more formalized skills groups, the student teacher can provide assistance with them and enable the teacher to spend time working with students individually or in small groups. Having an extra adult in the classroom should also allow more time to encourage creative writing. Journal writing is a good way to start. Children can be encouraged to write about things that interest them. If they know that someone will respond to

their ideas rather than just to their punctuation and grammar, they will be more willing to share their ideas and thoughts. An additional teacher in the class can help to facilitate rapid and regular feedback.

When children take the time to write and express their feelings either in a journal or a creative story, they need to be encouraged as writers. The classroom teacher does not usually have time to respond to the content in much detail. A student teacher can work with a group of children and actually write a letter in response to a story. The letter can describe what is interesting to the reader, what might be unclear, and how the story makes one feel. This gives the children an interested audience, and they are viewed as real writers.

A small group of children might also be interested in writing a script and producing a play for their classmates or another class. Students learn much about the reading-writing process when they write and edit a script for production. The student teacher can serve as a resource and a guide in this area. Children enjoy being actively involved and learn more in the process. Whereas the classroom teacher may not have the time and energy to supervise several different projects, a student teacher or practicum student can assist in encouraging a variety of creative activities.

Whether one is just beginning to use a more integrated approach to reading and writing or if one has been doing it for years, a student teacher can help to enrich the classroom. It is an ideal format in which to make effective use of regular volunteers. The cooperating teacher needs to provide the framework, but within this structure there is room for everyone to grow and learn together. Atwell (1985) says that teachers and students are in on something together. They have a literate environment where they can read, write and

share ideas about reading and writing. It is an environent where everyone is a participant.

Cooperating teachers can help to ensure the continuance of the literate environment by using the skills of the student teacher to enhance and expand this community of learners in the classroom. Learning to read and write is an ongoing process just as a whole language program is continually evolving and expanding to meet the needs of the learners. It is important that teachers share this process with others.

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